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(Cross-)Gendering the German Voice

> Imagine a calm, really feminine form, fully formed, about 30 years old; with beautiful arms, white, gentle, German, reliable, unspoilt; whose lips are open so wide that a lightly expressive, rich, full voice can comfortably flow through: then you will see Madame Milder, who performed in Gluck's *Armida* yesterday. If in your mind you add to such a figure an inner life of pure naivety that, in its innocence, reminds you of Pallas von Velletri (if I have the correct name), then you will have Armida.
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> That such a creature, who is inhibited by no rules or acquired knowledge of the art, flows along like a fine stream, who doesn't come and go and stand as if an audience were present, but is rather like a blacksmith [who stands] before a forge in order to pull out hot what was placed in cold; that such a creature causes confusion and conflict for the connoisseurs of our art will become very evident perhaps because one says: a pretty woman – but colossal; a beautiful voice – but not what one calls singing; gentle and feminine – but cold and so on – and yet such sensational applause, as if they were really enthralled, moved and touched.
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> So one sees with joy how the appearance of sheer talent turns to water the ideas of an entire generation, who had become so accustomed to suspending the natural.[1]
>
> Carl Friedrich Zelter, to Goethe, in 1815

Madame Milder was Pauline Anna Milder (1785-1838), in 1815 one of the most celebrated singers in German lands, courted by Spontini for Paris, and well on the way to securing an advantageous appointment in Berlin. Madame Milder (sometimes Milder-Hauptmann) was also, most famously, the first Fidelio, or rather, the first three Fidelios, persistently premiering the cross-dressing, pistol-toting, husband-devoted Leonore to the Viennese in 1805, 1806 and 1814.[2] In what follows, I shall pursue the ways in which her cross-

[1] Letter no. 180, Zelter to Goethe, Berlin, 10-17 June 1815, in *Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues*, translated and edited by Lorraine Byrne Bodley (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 191-2.

[2] She left her previous post at the Wiener Hofoper in May 1815, a move apparently prompted by unfavourable economic circumstances in Vienna after the Congress: see J. P Schmidt, 'Nekrolog', *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (hereafter *AmZ*), No. 28 (11 July 1838), pp. 449-

dressing in a range of repertoire, together with the gendered receptions of her physique and vocal production, contributed to the 'confusion and conflict' expressed in so genteel a fashion by Zelter; and the ways in which this category confusion enabled the discursive construction of a national singing style, which 'turn[ed] to water the ideas of an entire generation'.

For the purposes of this volume, this chapter may also serve to shed new light on a specifically Beethovenian question: how might we understand the contemporary resonances of the cross-dressing in *Fidelio*? This question has been pursued less than one might expect. Despite a measurable spike in female cross-dressing in German stage works during this period, *Fidelio* is one of the few canonical to *music* history, and thus Leonore has rarely been viewed as part of a broader German phenomenon.[3] This is perhaps linked to a historic hesitation, with a few notable exceptions, to bring the fields of gender studies and Beethoven studies together, an approach exemplified by Paul Robinson in his 1996 Cambridge Handbook on the opera:

> The most important thing about Leonore's transvestism is that it interests Beethoven not in the slightest. It is for him nothing more than a necessity of the plot … His art was desexualised on principle, the purest instance of sublimation, uncompromisingly spiritual and disembodied … In every meaningful musical and dramatic sense, Beethoven treats her exactly as if she were a man.[4]

I am not the first to challenge such a reading: two decades after the handbook's appearance, this supposed transcendence of gender was brilliantly recast by Matthew Head as nothing *less* than a necessity of plot: that it was actually highly significant for Beethoven that Fidelio was female. Heroic action from a woman was all the more heroic (and exceptional), in Beeethoven's eyes, because women had to transcend the greater limits of their gender. At the same time, Head argues, identification with women gave access to those 'feminine' qualities prized by Beethoven and the German Romantics, and indeed by the wider Christian culture, in the internalisation of heroism via resignation and patient suffering. Both of these strands can be seen in Beethoven's affinity with Joan of Arc, whose lines from Schiller's play

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452, at 451. She became Milder-Hauptmann in 1810, when she married the court jeweller Peter Hauptmann (1763-1858), but they later separated.

[3] See, for example, Michael L. Griffel and John Potter, 'Transcending Gender and Cross-Dressing: Leonore as Romantic Revolutionary', *The Beethoven Journal*, 11/1 (1996), pp. 9-11; Silke Leopold, 'Frauen in Männerkleidern oder: Versuch einer Antwort auf die scheinbar sinnlose Frage, warum Marzelline Leonore nicht erkennt', in *Von der Leonore zum Fidelio: Vorträge und Referate des Bonner Symposions 1997*, ed. Helga Lühning and Wolfram Steinbeck (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 147-158.

[4] '*Fidelio* and the French Revolution' in *Ludwig van Beethoven: Fidelio*, edited by Paul Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 68-110, at 96-7.

he quoted in relation to his own situation in letters to Bettina Brentano in 1811.[5]

What if, though, we were to pursue the meaning(s) of cross-dressing not through Beethoven — or Schiller, for that matter — but through its history as staged performance? Through movements, bodies and voices as perceived by audiences and critics? Even when the aim of cross-dressing was not to 'pass' as a man on stage but to express androgyneity (as in the case of Schiller's Joan of Arc who, styled on Minerva, wore a helmet and breastplate, but not trousers), some at the time seem to have struggled with the qualities that so appealed to Beethoven's imagination.[6] A Berlin reviewer in 1805, for example, lamented the ultimate limits of Luise Fleck's performance of Joan, concluding that 'verisimilitude in this role can only be increased to the extent that the [female] actor's figure is more masculine'. In his view, a 'female role with unfemininity', such as the 'unnaturalness' of a girl's hand grasping a sword, would always resist performance, being convincing only to the intellect, but not to feeling.[7] Cross-dressing on the operatic stage posed similar *and* additional—vocal—challenges for audiences in this period. In addressing the relative scholarly neglect of these issues in a German context, I shall focus on the extensive reception discourse that gathers around Milder in the years leading up to 1814—in a range of roles, performed and discussed across German lands.

While my conclusions can be read onto the particular Beethovenian case within a specifically Viennese context, I will ultimately cast the singer in a larger role here. What emerges from descriptions of Milder's performances, as can be seen in Zelter's letter, is that her disruption of increasingly binary gender categories had consequences for other binary oppositions in operatic discourse, in particular those of national singing styles. This period has typically been cast in German operatic history as that of the hunt for a national opera, via Weber and *Der Freischütz*, Hoffmann and *Undine* and so on, in opposition to the dominance of the Italian tradition; and the construction of the German-Italian binary eventually known as the 'twin styles'. Beethoven's opera has always been somewhat offset from histories of this discourse, not least because of the emblematic status of his symphonic works. But I would suggest that *Fidelio* can be resituated within it indirectly by pursuing the role that singers – rather than composers and works – played

[5] Matthew Head, 'Beethoven Heroine: A Female Allegory of Music and Authorship in *Egmont*', in *Sovereign Feminine: Music and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 190-232.

[6] On Schiller's cross-dressing of Joan see Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, 'Wearing the Trousers: The Woman Warrior as Cross-dresser in German Literature', in *Women and Death 2: Warlike Women in the German Literary and Cultural Imagination Since 1500*, ed. Sarah Colvin, and Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly (Rochester, NY; Woodbridge: Camden House, 2009), pp. 28-44, at 35-36.

[7] *Haude und Spenersche Zeitung* (hereafter *HSZ*) No. 49 (23 April 1805).

in its construction; and specifically, the role of Milder and her reviewers in this process. Milder's category-crossing voice and figure destabilised pre-existing associations between gender, singing style and nation, and enabled new ones. This space of possibility, I will argue, allowed for the emergence of a newly conceived category of German operatic vocality. For many critics in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the idea of the 'German voice' was embodied by Milder.

Cross-Dressing on the German (Operatic) Stage

In both operatic and spoken theatre genres, high and low, cross-dressed women were a pronounced feature on the German stage around 1800. In recent literary scholarship this has been attributed to a set of interlocking developments. Firstly, the high profile examples of female heroism and cross-dressed military service in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars are thought to have provoked a desire to celebrate or contain the phenomenon.[8] Secondly, as Thomas Laqueur has shown, where previously women were thought to have inverted versions of male genitalia, and gender characteristics thus to exist on a spectrum of greater or lesser masculinity, by the late eighteenth century the emerging 'two-sex', or 'Geschlechtscharakter', model located the differences between men and women in their entirely different bodies—in fundamental (and 'natural') differences in kind. The qualities of masculine and feminine were thus associated increasingly rigidly with biological sex.[9] At the same time, German Romantic writers such as Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, Schleiermacher and Jean Paul celebrated androgyny as an ideal of wholeness via a synthesis of polar opposites.[10] These new conceptualisations of gender had their theatrical consequences: the familiar figure of Joan of Arc was accompanied on stage by women in various states of cross-dress (and musicalisation): Klärchen in Goethe's *Egmont* (1788); Zacharias Werner's *Wanda, Königin der Sarmaten* (Weimar, 1808; Vienna, 1810, with Milder as Wanda); Heinrich von Kleist's amazon *Penthesilea* (not performed, 1808); Piwald's *Das Mädchen von Potsdam* (Vienna,

[8] See, for example, Elisabeth Krimmer, *In the Company of Men: Cross-Dressed Women Around 1800* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004); Colvin and Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Women and Death 2*; Wendy C Nielsen, *Women Warriors in Romantic Drama* (Newark: University Of Delaware Press, 2013).

[9] Wilhelm von Humboldt's 1795 essays 'Über den Geschlechtsunterschied und dessen Einfluß auf die organische Natur' and 'Über die männliche und weibliche Form' are widely cited examples of this new position. See Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[10] Jean Paul called Novalis a 'Mannweib', for example. See Catriona MacLeod, *Embodying Ambiguity: Androgyny and Aesthetics from Wincklemann to Keller* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998), p. 49, fn 58; and Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*, (London: Women's Press, 1989).

1814); Friedrich Duncker's *Leonore Prohaska* (1815, with Beethoven's music, but apparently not performed); Johann Gottlieb Naumann's *La Dama soldato/Das Weibliche Soldat* (Dresden, 1791); Adalbert Gyrowetz's *Mirina, Königin der Amazonen* (Vienna, 1806); Johann Friedrich Reichardt's *Bradamante* (Vienna, 1809, with Milder as Bradamante); and Ferdinand Kauer's *Die Amazonen in Böhmen* (Vienna, 1815), to name but a few.

Situations of cross-dressing where women appear temporarily in male disguise, or as androgynous or war-like characters, differ somewhat from the familiar scholarly narratives on operatic (and usually Italian operatic) cross-dressing in this period. Musicological accounts tend to trace the decline of the castrato[11] and his replacement in male soprano roles by cross-dressed women, whether in roles originally written for castrati (such as Zingarelli's *Giulietta e Romeo*, 1796 – created by Girolamo Crescentini but perpetuated by Guiditta Pasta and Maria Malibran), or male roles written for women, continuing the tradition of the heroic soprano pitch (such as the title role in Rossini's *Tancredi*, 1813, created by Adelaide Malanotte).[12] Gradually, solidifying conventions of gender difference produce the rise of the heroic tenor and the decline of cross-dressing women in general, except for particular roles: the youth (such as Romeo in Bellini's *I Capuleti ed I Montecchi*, 1830) or the occasional disguise role (Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto*, 1851). During the first few decades of the nineteenth century when women commonly replaced castrati, meanwhile, they have been interpreted as 'haunted' by the 'hidden aesthetic' of the castrato tradition of bel canto;[13] and as summoning nostalgia for the castrato.[14]

Such interpretative frameworks are not easily transferable to the German context: not only were many of the cross-dressed roles disguised or warrior women rather than male soprano roles, but castrati had also long been triply foreign to the discourse of the German music profession, as

[11] Meyerbeer's *Il Crociato in Egitto* (1824), for Giovanna Battista Velluti, is thought to be the last castrato role. See Martha Feldman, *The Castrato: Reflections on Natures and Kinds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); James Q. Davies, '"Veluti in Speculum": The Twilight of the Castrato' in *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 13-40.

[12] See, for example, Naomi André's *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006); and Heather Hadlock, 'Women Playing Men in Italian Opera', in *Women's Voices across Musical Worlds*, ed. Jane A. Bernstein (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), pp. 285-304; Heather Hadlock, 'On the Cusp between Past and Future: The Mezzo-Soprano Romeo of Bellini's *I Capuletti*', *Opera Quarterly*, 17/3 (2001), pp. 299-322.

[13] See André, *Voicing Gender*, pp. 12, 16-50; and Davies, '"Veluti in Speculum"', p. 17.

[14] Feldman cites Stendhal framing Pasta as part of the 'bonne école' of Crescentini and Velluti, for example: *The Castrato*, pp. 234-7, 239.

aristocratic, Italian and, of course, castrated.[15] And although Italian operas were performed in German lands with castrato roles replaced by women (Sextus in Mozart's *Titus*, for example), by far the more common instance of cross-dressed women singing male roles hitting the headlines in the first few decades of the nineteenth century was women taking on tenor roles. This was presented as a musical necessity, whether due to the lack of tenors;[16] or the lack of good contralto roles to provide a vehicle for stars such as Marianne Schönberger-Marconi (1785-1882).[17] Moreover, while both soprano and alto cross-dressed operatic performance was condemned by some commentators as a perversion of nature, as sexual titillation, or as a musical distortion of the original work (responses also found in Italian discourse), it was the cross-dressing altos that were subject to the most pronounced criticism from the perspective of what we would now call gender performance.[18] Schönberger's appearance in Munich in 1812 as Belmonte in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and then as the lead in Paër's *Sargino*, provoked 'a certain enthusiasm, spread by the novelty of a female man', but led one reviewer to issue a reproof:

> The large crowd may well admire the rare and adventurous, but it must also return to the natural and the true. An alto voice can no more replace the tenor, than the male dress or the painted moustache lend male strength. And who [amongst us] who respects the dignity of women would like to see such attempts multiplied?[19]

The deepness of the alto voice (the possibility of equivalence) seems to account for the greater discomfort elicited by alto cross-dressing. The unpopularity of Marianne Sehring's performance in Königsberg, for example, was attributed to her 'somewhat masculine organ (like [that of] every alto)'.[20] Schönberger's performance in Vienna as Titus drew praise for her artistry in song and acting, but prompted the reflection that 'one leaves the

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[15] See Elizabeth Krimmer, '"Evviva il coltello?": The Castrato Singer in Eighteenth-Century German Literature and Culture', *PMLA* 120/5 (2005), pp. 1543-59; and Sophie Bertone, '"Benedetto il coltello?": Wilhelm Heinse und die Kastraten', in *Musikalisches Denken im Labyrinth der Aufklärung: Wilhelm Heinses Hildegard von Hohenthal*, ed. by Thomas Irvine, Wiebke Thormählen und Oliver Wiener (Mainz: Are, 2015), pp. 145-162.

[16] See *AmZ* No. 19 (11 May 1814) 317**;** *AmZ* No. 11 (15 March 1815), 186.

[17] *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* (hereafter *MfGS*) No. 274 (15 November 1811), 1096. The contralto Friederike Ellmenreich (1775-1845) was also well known for her tenor roles.

[18] On the first two objections, see Freyherr von Seckendorff's preface to his *Vorlesungen über Deklamation und Mimik*, Vol. 1 (Braunschweig: Friedrich Vieweg, 1816), pp. 5-6. Complaints about the distortion of the original composition can be seen in criticism of Milder as Tamino in *MfGS* No. 166 (11 July 1812), 664; *AmZ* No 34 (19 August 1812), 559; *AmZ* No. 41 (7 October 1812), 668; *AmZ* No. 10 (9 March 1814), 163; and of Schönberger at tenor pitch in *MfGS* No. 142 (14 June 1811), 568; *MfGS* No. 274 (15 November 1811), 1095.

[19] *AmZ* No. 8 (19 February 1812), 122.

[20] *AmZ* No. 40 (5 July 1809), 638.

theatre with a certain coldness, which, however, may also be explained by the fact that a masculine quality found in a lady excludes both sexes too sharply, and for psychological reasons, cannot arouse lively interest on any side'.[21] Likewise, in his 1816 acting treatise *Vorlesungen über Deklamation und Mimik*, Freyherr von Seckendorff argued that when Schönberger sings at tenor pitch, neither 'unfemininity [nor] unmanliness' are detectable, the curious expression suggesting a specific discomfort with the androgyny of the alto voice in this range, which lacks definite markers of either sex.[22]

The tenorial alto in male clothing was all too ambiguous for these critics, despite the long operatic traditions of cross-dressing and castrati, and their rejection of this androgyny most likely reflects the increasing polarisation of gender binaries discussed above. Indeed, Catriona MacLeod has argued that the earlier 'polymorphous, hermaphroditic ideal of androgyny proposed by Winckelmann', which was based on genders existing on a spectrum, gave way to a 'model grounded in heterosexual complementarity' in the theories of Humboldt, Schiller and Schlegel (presupposing the opposition of the two sexes in the first place). This led, she argues, to 'the uncanny doubleness that will mark the androgyne's future: monstrosity in the real world versus perfection in the aesthetic realm'.[23] Any operatic cross-dressing performed—in the real world—a potential disruption of those emerging binaries, and the tenorial alto more than most.

But it was not merely the (re)assertion of those 'natural' binaries that was provoked in response: operatic cross-dressing in this period had a productive destabilising impact on categories of national style of the kind suggested by Marjorie Garber in her classic formulation of the cause and impact of transvestism:

> one of the most consistent and effective functions of the transvestite in culture is to indicate the place of what I call 'category crisis', disrupting and calling attention to cultural, social, or aesthetic dissonances ... The binarism male/female, one apparent ground of distinction (in contemporary eyes, at least) between 'this' and 'that', 'him' and 'me' is itself put in question or under erasure in transvestism, and a transvestite figure, or a transvestite mode, will always function as a sign of over-determination – a mechanism of displacement from one blurred boundary to another. [24]

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[21] *MfGS* No. 81 (5 April 1813), 324.

[22] Seckendorff, *Vorlesungen über Deklamation und Mimik*, Vol. 1, p. 211. See Marco Beghelli and Raffaele Talmelli, *Ermafrodite armoniche: Il contralto nel'Ottocento* (Varese: Zecchini, 2011) for similar Italian responses to the contralto voice.

[23] MacLeod, *Embodying Ambiguity*, pp. 23, 32

[24] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 16

The transvestite produces a 'third' to those binary divisions, 'a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility' in response to or inducing a crisis in category.[25]

Garber's theory can be productively applied here, though its applicability is more suggestive than exact. In fact, precisely because the cross-dressed tenorial alto was so acutely destabilising, the space it may have opened up for imagining 'thirds' in operatic performance seems to have been shut down discursively—as far as possible—by critics. The less radical but still destabilising soprano cross-dresser, however, *does* seem to have functioned as a space for the negotiation of categories of national operatic difference in a German context. Because the 'natural' sex of the cross-dressed soprano singer remained recognisably (vocally) female even if hybrid gender characteristics were displayed, a 'masculinised soprano' such as Milder both left the binary categories intact *and* enabled German critics to position their responses to her within the emerging opposition of Italian and German styles ('them' and 'us') in nineteenth-century opera criticism. Here, I would argue, is a new framework through which we can appreciate the distinctiveness of German responses to operatic cross-dressing, understand the cultural work done by Milder's cross-dressing as Wanda, Bradamante, Fidelio *et al*, and gain new purchase on the transformations in German discourses of national operatic style in this period.

These discursive developments are part of a larger and longer story, of course. If in the eighteenth century the most prominent binary categories of musical nationhood had been the opposition of French and Italian operatic styles (as demonstrated most famously in the Querelle des Bouffons), the international dominance of Italian opera, particularly in German lands, was long established. Effeminacy, moreover, had been attributed by some German writers to Italian music since the mid–eighteenth century, above all to elite opera, above all to the castrato, leading to a common association in German music criticism between vocality itself, Italy and effeminacy.[26] The gendered, devalorising rhetoric surrounding Italian opera contributed to the establishment of masculine instrumental music as the German national musical product, in a way that could be mapped onto other binaries, whether melody vs harmony/counterpoint, or fashion vs profundity.[27] This model of

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[25] Garber, *Vested Interests*, p. 11. See Naomi Andre's different use of Garber in *Voicing Gender*, pp. 48-50.

[26] See Krimmer, '"Evviva il coltello?"', p. 1543; Mary Sue Morrow shows how these binaries inflected the German reception of Italian instrumental music in *German Music Criticism in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 46-65.

[27] The twin styles, or *Stildualismus* framework was influentially propagated by Carl Dahlhaus in his *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989). More recently, it has been subject to extensive deconstruction: see

overlapping binaries involved the subsumption of the French, as we shall see, as well as the discursive construction of a distinctively German musical category (partly through mere opposition with its Italian counterpart), where previously the German had been portrayed as a 'mix' of other national styles.[28] But the overlapping binaries created a particularly problematic ground for establishing a German national category in the field of opera, both in theory and practice: with operatic vocality itself associated with Italianness and effeminacy—and the world of opera in German lands dominated by French and Italian composers, genres and Italian performers— the very art of singing required rhetorical transformation for the category of 'German opera' to succeed.

Madame Milder as German Voice

Milder first took music lessons with the village schoolmaster in Hütteldorf, outside Vienna, before studying with Sigismund von Neukomm and Antonio Salieri in the capital. Her vocal persona, as discursively constructed by the press, is at least in part a product of her early role choices and vocal technique. As Andreas Mayer has pointed out, she debuted in 1803 at the Theater an der Wien as Juno in Franz Süssmayr's heroic-comic opera *Der Spiegel von Arkadien* with a simple rather than bravura aria.[29] Later the same year, she played the cross-dressed role of Cambyses in Ignaz von Seyfried's heroic opera *Cyrus in Persien*. Georg August Griesinger, reporting on the performance for the *AmZ*, wrote that 'her voice sounds as the purest metal, as is seldom the case, and, since her teacher Neukomm is from the Haydn school, she gives long strong notes without frills and overloaded ornaments'.[30]

Nicholas Mathew and Benjamin Walton, eds., *The Invention of Beethoven and Rossini: Historiography, Analysis, Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[28] See Bernd Sponheuer, 'Reconstructing Ideal Types of the "German" in Music', in *Music and German National Identity*, edited by Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 36-58.

[29] Andreas Mayer, '"Gluck'sches Gestöhn" und "welsches Larifari": Anna Milder, Franz Schubert und der deutsch-italienische Opernkrieg', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 52/3 (1995), pp. 171-204, at 175-6. The aria comes Act 2, scene 3: 'Juno wird dich stets umschweben'. There is not the space here to pursue Milder's investment (or not) in a 'German' ideal. Certainly she continued to sing Italian arias in concerts despite her technical limitations, and even, in the 1820s, repeatedly (and ill-advisedly) attempted Rossini in order to compete with other prima donnas such as Henriette Sontag. See her letter to Ignaz von Mosel in 1828, cited in Mayer, '"Gluck'sche Gestöhn"', p. 187, fn 50.

[30] *AmZ* No. 2 (14 December 1803), 180. This appears in Georg August Griesinger's *Korrespondenz mit Joseph Haydns Verleger Breitkopf & Härtel 1799–1819*, ed. Otto Biba (Zürich: Atlantis, 1987), p. 213.

Mayer underlines the usefulness of Milder's voice to the supporters of German opera in Vienna, of whom Ignaz von Mosel was the high priest.[31] But her significance was in fact far wider on account of her tours in this period, including, in 1810, to Frankfurt, Stuttgart und Ludwigsburg; in 1811, to Linz, Munich, Stuttgart and Darmstadt; in 1812, to Breslau and Berlin; in 1813, to Karlsruhe, Linz, Darmstadt and Frankfurt; in 1814, Mannheim and Karlsruhe; in 1815 Berlin (twice) and Hamburg. Her performances and voice were therefore discussed in a reading community that stretched across German lands, in journals and in publications such as Reichardt's *Vertraute Briefe geschrieben auf einer Reise nach Wien und den Oesterreichischen Staaten zu Ende des Jahres 1808 und zu Anfang 1809* (itself reviewed in the same journals), where the author stated that hers 'is outright the most beautiful, fullest, purest voice I have ever heard in my life in Italy, Germany, France and England'.[32] As such, she was measured against her reputation in print on arrival in a new city, and offered a shared point of reference for reviewers and correspondents thereafter.[33] The correspondent from Stuttgart in 1810, for example, reported that the 'star of the first greatness on our dramatic horizons' had perfectly satisfied their high expectations;[34] a month later in Frankfurt, on the other hand, 'as a singer who was so popular in the newspapers, in Reichardt's *Briefen* etc., she did not live up to our expectations';[35] while in 1812, the Berlin correspondent warned that '*praesentia minuit famam*', [presence diminishes fame].[36]

Within this community of critics pronouncing on Milder's voice, there was consensus about its beauty and power, but her technique and singing style was celebrated by some as simple and natural (that is, embodying potentially strong 'German' qualities) and decried by others as lacking the flexibility and polish associated with Italian singing, depending on the affinities of the commentator. As early as 1808, Mosel styled her as the choice of the connoisseurs, with her 'powerful, expressive, deeply thought-out performance' and her 'resurrection of the simple, natural song, which

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[31] Mayer, '"Gluck'sche Gestöhn"', pp. 175-6.

[32] Johann Friedrich Reichardt, *Vertraute Briefe: geschrieben auf einer Reise nach Wien und den Osterreichischen Staaten zu Ende des Jahres 1808 und zu Anfang 1809*, Vol. 1 (Amsterdam, Kunst- und Industrie-Comtoir, 1810), p. 156.

[33] For examples of Milder used as the point of comparison for other singers, see *Musikalische Zeitung für die österreichischen Staaten* No. 4 (31 May 1812), 27 (Munich); *MfGS* No. 289 (2 December 1812), 1156 (Stuttgart); *MfGS* No. 50 (28 February1815), 300 (Carlsruhe); *MfGS* No. 210 (2 September 1815), 840 (Munich).

[34] *MfGS* No. 209 (31 August 1810), 835.

[35] *AmZ* No. 49 (5 September 1810), 790-1.

[36] *AmZ* No. 41 (7 October 1812), 669.

alone corresponds to the true taste'.[37] In 1810, a Stuttgart critic made explicit her national significance:

> The impact her singing made on audiences accustomed to the more decorated Italian school was unique. No coloratura, no trills, no mordants, none of all that, by which otherwise the ear can be bribed, but the simplest, most soulful, one would like to say most genuine German song of a 'harmonica voice', which gives the smallest note its full due...[38]

Two years later a reporter from Breslau described a continued division in the audience between those with a taste for 'flourishes and fioritura [roulades], leaps and other such arts' and those who appreciated 'the metal of her splendid organ, the evenness of the tones, both in strength and in sound, to an extent of two octaves, the purity'.[39]

There were plenty of critics, however, who remained committed to the art of flourishes and fioritura; for whom Italian models were the benchmark of operatic singing, even for a German singer. One Frankfurter in 1810 doubted that Milder should really be classified as a singer at all (a question raised by Zelter too, in a less pejorative way), on account of the simplicity of her roles (her standard touring repertoire consisted of Emmeline in Weigl's *Die Schweizerfamilie*, the title roles in Gluck's *Iphigenie in Tauris* and Paer's *Sargines*, Therese in Weigl's *Das Waisenhaus*, and Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*) and the absence of all that 'can be expected of a well-trained singer: no growth and disappearance of the sound, not a mordant, even fewer trills and roulades'.[40] During her 1811 visit to Munich, the *AmZ*, while commending Milder for 'striving to restore the rights of reason and good taste' in theatrical singing, nonetheless remarked that a 'dry song cannot be the 'height of art', finding her lacking relative to 'Farinelli, David, and Crescentini ... Grassini, Todi and Banti'.[41] A year later, the *AmZ* concluded not only that 'her song is only ever beautiful declamation, [it] never overflows into the actual art of singing', but also that her acting 'portrays nature rather too stark-nakedly' [splitternackt].[42]

Milder's best and worst vocal qualities were therefore one and the same, and she was presented as incompatible with established Italianate models of singing. The terms of her reviews built on and expanded binary oppositions of vocality: whether 'genuine German song' vs the 'decorated'

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[37] *Vaterländische Blätter für den österreichischen Kaiserstaat* No. 7 (31 May 1808), 49.
[38] *MfGS* No. 209 (31 August 1810), 835.
[39] *AmZ* No. 41 (7 October 1812), 668.
[40] *AmZ* No. 49 (5 September 1810), 790-791.
[41] *AmZ* No. 37 (11 September 1811), 625.
[42] *AmZ* No. 18 (29 April 1812), 304.

Italian school; 'Grösse' and 'Ernst' vs 'Galanterie' and 'Scherz';[43] or deficient technique (mere declamation) vs art, or nature vs artifice. These oppositions dominated the reception of Milder's visit to Berlin in 1812 in particular, not least through the rivalry with local, conventionally 'kunstreich' [artful] singer Auguste Schmalz, against whom Milder's virtues were measured.[44] Reviewers accorded both artists their 'own crowns': Milder 'freshness of voice and … noble naturalness'; Schmalz 'the art of prodigious skill and precision'.[45] One journalist even dramatized their joint concert as a 'competition' in which audience members shrieked a number of well-constructed soundbites: 'It is the battle of nature with art, but nature will be victorious!'; 'Dem. Schmalz has her voice much more in her power … but Mad. Milder has much more power in her voice'; 'I dedicate to Dlle. Schmalz my ears, Mad. Milder my heart'.[46]

The familiar elements of this reception (the characterisation of virtuosity as empty effect, for example) should not obscure the light it can shed on operatic twin styles rhetoric, in particular the transferral of characteristics between nations and genres relative to eighteenth-century discourses. I have already suggested that German *opera*, as a vocal genre, could not easily fit into the overlapping binaries of the twin styles. Where Italian opera was opposed to German instrumental music, its associated qualities of effeminacy, simplicity/superficiality and melody could be positioned against masculinity, complexity, and harmony/counterpoint. German opera could not do without melody, however; nor could it be effeminate. In an attempt to create a distinct—and positive—category for the German vocality, then, genuine, simple and natural German song was opposed to Italian opera's insincerity, *over*-complexity and/or artifice. The opposition of nature and art, which across the course of the eighteenth century had been used to valorise (Italian) vocal simplicity against (often German) instrumental complexity in the form of the galant; Italian vocal naturalness against French operatic formality in the *querelle des Bouffons*; and then later, French 'naturalness' against Italian artifice in the operatic reforms of Gluck etc, is here re-employed to elevate the German operatic voice over the Italian.

Such a rhetorical twist was possible in part through an established association of German vocality with simplicity and naturalness in the shape of the Lied and the Singspiel.[47] Both genres had been presented as an

[43] *AmZ* No. 522 (9 December 1813), 846.
[44] *AmZ* No. 41 (7 October 1812), 669.
[45] *AmZ* No. 41 (7 October 1812), 669; *MfGS* No. 250, (17 October 1812), 1000.
[46] 'Der Wettkampf im Konzerte des Hrn. Sidoni', *MfGS* No. 261 (30 October 1812), 1043.
[47] See Estelle Joubert, 'Songs to Shape a German Nation: Hiller's Comic Operas and the Public Sphere.' *Eighteenth-Century Music*, 3/2 (2006), pp. 213–230; and Jennifer Ronyak,

indigenous alternative to Italian opera since the eighteenth century, though the very source of their simplicity and 'authenticity'—as products 'im Volkston'—gave them an ambiguous aesthetic status relative to tragic opera. The elevation of the German 'natural' relies, I argue, on the incorporation of 'French' values associated with Gluck's tragic operas into the idea of German opera, at a time when Gluck himself was also being redefined as German.[48] This can be seen in descriptions of Milder's '*noble* naturalness', as above, and in the attention given to her supposedly natural acting, declamation, and general adherence to the score (where celebrated rather than bemoaned, that is). One Stuttgart reviewer suggested that Milder unusually combined the roles of singer and actor;[49] Reichardt highlighted her 'heroic figure and movement' as Iphigenia, 'without the affected operatic comings and goings and distortions of the body and neck', observations that Zelter then echoes in his letter to Goethe: she 'doesn't come and go and stand as if an audience were present'.[50] A Munich correspondent in 1811 rejoiced that in avoiding ornamentation in Gluck's *Iphigénie in Tauris*, Milder 'remains faithful to the serious character of the composition',[51] reviews from Berlin in 1812 and 1815 likewise celebrated that she did 'nothing other than what the composer wanted'.[52] Her performance in Breslau in 1812, moreover, highlighted her 'proper declamation in the designation of musical and rhetorical accents'.[53] In fact, the adoption of Gluckian reform opera as the model for German was explicit in von Mosel's *Versuch einer Aesthetik des dramatischen Tonsatzes* (1812), in which Gluck and Salieri are the primary reference points, and literature from the Imperial French conservatoire is actually quoted in order to describe

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'Anna Milder-Hauptmann's "Favourite Lied": The Domestic Side of a Monumental Simplicity' in *Liedersingen: Studien zur Aufführungsgeschichte des Liedes im 18. Und 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Katharina Hottmann, *Jahrbuch Musik und Gender* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2013), pp. 93-108.

[48] Gundula Kreuzer has pursued this move in the context of later historiography in '*Heilige Trias, Stildualismus, Beethoven*: On the Limits of Nineteenth-Century Germanic Music Historiography', in *The Invention of Beethoven and Rossini*, pp. 66-95. On the Frenchness of German opera, see John Warrack, *German Opera: From the Beginnings to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); on the 'Germanness' of Gluck, see Katherine Hambridge, 'Catching up and Getting Ahead', *The Oxford Handbook to the Operatic Canon*, ed. Cormac Newark and William Weber (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2020).

[49] *MfGS*,No. 209, (31 August 1810), 835.

[50] Reichardt, *Vertraute Briefe*, Vol. 1, p. 157

[51] *MfGS* No 202 (23 August 1811), 808.

[52] *MfGS* No. 239 (5 October 1812), 956; *MfGS* No. 163 (10 July 1815), 652.

[53] *AmZ* No. 41 (7 October 1812), 668. See also commendation of her declamation in *AmZ* No. 37 (1 September 1811), 625; and *AmZ* No. 9 (26 February 1812), 140.

the art of dramatic song: 'The singer should be the true organ of the poet and composer'.[54]

Even Milder's (probably necessary) alterations to the score could be cast as a kind of operatic reform. Her performance of Sargines in Vienna in 1808 involved cutting out almost all of the melismatic passages – of which there are a significant number – but 'what remained for us was sung by Dem. Milder all the more beautifully, with such power and purity, that one gladly forgot all passages'.[55] Zelter, in the continuation of his reflections on Milder's performance of Armida in 1815, remarked that 'a true work is clearly recognised by a true performance. This honest Pallas drops what does not impose itself and rises to the heavens with that which suits her. Gluck has clearly paid too much attention to minutiae'. Milder out-Glucked Gluck.

If the emergence of a German (Gluckian) operatic identity against an Italian represents a vocal complication of the binaries nested within twin styles discourse, this extends to the gendering of those categories. Fashionable Italian virtuosity had long been designated and devalued as effeminate, but its emerging German *vocal* antagonist is not as obviously gendered as its instrumental. With Italian art(ifice) opposed by German nature, (over-) complexity and technical skill by simplicity, German vocality is in danger of becoming feminine, even with its Gluckian nobility: indeed both types of vocality could oppose the 'masculinity' of German instrumental music. But the masculinised voice, persona and figure of Milder, who in 1816 would be declared by the *Hamburgisches Morgenblatt* both the 'genuine German voice' *and* the 'best German voice', associated these potentially feminine qualities of simplicity and naturalness with more masculine ones, allowing German critics to accord the emerging category the requisite national prestige.[56]

Madame Milder as Masculinised Voice

The masculinity of Milder's public persona —according to the gender binaries emerging at the time —brings us back, in the first place, to her cross-dressing. The tenor roles of Sargines and Tamino formed part of her regular repertoire not only at home in Vienna but on tour, suggesting something more than the necessities of staffing and rather a vocal or dramatic identification with these roles. At the same time, Milder was employed in one-off male roles in Vienna for the now forgotten *Cyrus in*

[54] Ignaz Franz von Mosel, *Versuch einer Aesthetik des dramatischen Tonsatzes* (Vienna: Anton Strauss, 1813), p. 69.
[55] *AmZ* No. 1 (5 October 1808), 11.
[56] This was in comparison to Catalani, who was declared the 'best Italian voice'. *Hamburgisches Morgenblatt* No. 99 (17 August 1816), 799-800.

Persien mentioned above, for Friedrich August Kanne's opera *Orpheus* (1807) and Giovanni Liverati's biblical opera *David, oder Goliaths Tod* (1813).[57]

And then there were her partially or temporarily cross-dressed, bellicose women: the Polish ruling warrior Wanda in Werner's 'Schauspiel mit Gesang'; Reichardt's female knight Bradamante, a part written with Milder in mind but which only received private performance;[58] and of course, Fidelio. Moreover, many of the French roles that were central to Milder's repertoire and acclaim were women that step outside the bounds of idealised middle-class femininity, to put it mildly: Medea (Cherubini), Alceste, Armida, Clytemnestra (Gluck), Semiramis (Catel).[59] This is paradoxically apparent in a strained description of Milder's performance of Clytemnestra in 1809 as having an 'indescribable majesty and grandeur that nevertheless never transgressed the sweet lines of femininity'.[60]

Milder did also play roles that portrayed more conventional ideas of femininity in Emmeline and Therese, though the contrast to Gluck's heroines had as much to do with class as concepts of gender. Having premiered Emmeline in Vienna in 1809, she remained *the* interpreter of the role for many years on account of the simplicity and naturalness of her singing and acting, bringing, as one Berlin reviewer put it, 'deeply-felt expression, high innocence, and moving warmth' to the role of the 'naïve' Swiss maid.[61] The intimacy and naturalness of her Emmeline was a trope of her reception,[62] but so too was its seeming contradiction with her other heroic characters. The same Berlin critic found her Emmeline all the more praiseworthy for her Medea, in which her 'play and her posture are everywhere noble and imposing'.[63] A Munich reporter in 1811 had likewise juxtaposed her nobility and heroism with her simplicity; a Breslauer in 1812 identified both the sublime and the cosy [gemüthlich] in her performances.[64]

For some the notable contrast between Milder's roles was a function of her physical presence: she was, by most accounts, statuesque. One reviewer of her Berlin performances in 1812 compared Emmeline to Iphegenia, noting that 'the noisy part of the theatre audience first turned its attention to the appearance of the foreign artist, and of course found without reservation that a figure of excellent size and fullness ['Fülle'] was good for

[57] *AmZ* No. 23 (9 June 1813), 382-3.
[58] Reichardt, *Vertraute Briefe*, Vol 1, p. 439.
[59] *AmZ* No. 8 (18 November 1806), 121-123.
[60] *MfGS* No. 73 (24 March 1809), 284.
[61] *AmZ*, No. 42 (13 October 1812), 691-2.
[62] See, for example, the Munich report: *MfGS* No. 202 (23 August 1811), 808; and Letter 147, Zelter to Goethe, Berlin 30 May-13 September 1812, *Goethe and Zelter*, p. 158.
[63] *AmZ*, No. 42 (13 October 1812), 691-2.
[64] See *MfGS* No. 202 (23 August 1811), 808; *AmZ* No. 41 (7 October 1812), 668.

Iphigenia, but never for Emmeline'.[65] In 1811 Johann Carl Friedrich Rellstab had described her as 'large and imposing' (terms often repeated, along with noble), 'a head above the other Priestesses', and for this reason unsuited to the sweet lovesickness of Emmeline.[66] Jennifer Ronyak has suggested that her stature may have been exaggerated to fit with her vocal image,[67] and a Viennese portrait of her as Alceste, in which her head almost touches the ceiling, would certainly suggest that ([insert IMAGE around here] see figure 1), but there is a symbiotic relationship between her cross-dressing, masculinised persona and perceived height, whatever her actual measurements. In Vienna as Tamino she was praised for 'masculine bearing',[68] while in the droll dramatization of her 'competition' with. Schmalz, where art competed with nature, the Berliners' interest in her height and masculinity was highlighted:

> The men thought she was beautiful, the ladies had a lot to complain about; masculinity especially was the reproach against the high figure and the determinedness in appearance. 'She should not be called Milder Hauptmann, she should be called Hauptmann [Captain] Milder!' joked a Jewish lady.[69]

The masculinity of her persona also emerges from the evocation of the size and strength of her voice. The anecdote of Joseph Haydn exclaiming to a young Milder, 'dear child, you have the voice of a house'[70] is accompanied by many iterations of 'groß,' 'voll' and 'stark' in others' descriptions of it. Reichardt pronounced it in his *Vertraute Briefe* as the 'largest' and the 'fullest' voice he'd heard;[71] and reviewers in the *AmZ* repeatedly extolled her power ['Kraft'] and amplitude ['Fülle']:[72] in *Fidelio* in 1814, it was Milder's melodiousness and *power* that delighted the Viennese.[73] These qualities also emerge from the recurrent themes of Milder's metallic or bell-like 'Klang'. 'Klang' could simply refer to tone or sound, but its use alongside metal and bells suggests rather its figurative meaning of 'sonorousness' and 'ring' (and

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[65] *MfGS* No. 239 (5 October 1812), 956.

[66] Rellstab, 'Über die Stimme der Madame Hauptmann-Milder zu Wien', *Thalia* No. 95. (27 November 1811), 379.

[67] Jennifer Ronyak, 'Performing the Lied, Performing the Self: Singing Subjectivity in Germany, 1790-1832' (PhD Dissertation, University of Rochester, 2010), p. 242. Heather Hadlock has suggested similar exaggerations in descriptions of the cross-dressing contralto Rosmunda Pisaroni's ugliness in 'Women Playing Men', p. 292-4.

[68] *AmZ* No 34 (19 August 1812), 55.

[69] *MfGS* No. 261 (30 October 1812), 1043.

[70] Reported in C. F. v. Ledebur's *Tonkünstler-Lexicon Berlins von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart* (Berlin 1861), p. 375.

[71] Reichardt, *Vertraute Briefe*, vol. 1, pp. 143, 156. See also *AmZ* No. 22 (26 February 1805), 351.

[72] *AmZ* No. 42 (14 October 1812), 691; *AmZ* No. 21 (18 February 1807), 335-6.

[73] *MfGS* No. 232 (28 September 1814), 928.

thereby size, too). As Tamino in Mannheim in 1814, Milder sang the aria 'Pamina retten ist mir Pflicht' with 'the whole force ['Gewalt'] and bell-sonority [Glockenklang] of her mighty voice';[74] E. T. A. Hoffmann praised her 'enormous [gewaltig], pure silver bell tones' in *Die Vestalin* in 1816.[75] As already cited, Griesinger described her voice in 1803 as 'the purest metal', while in 1806, in Handel's Messiah, she displayed a 'full, pure, clear, metal-voice [Metallstimme]'.[76] Establishing the historical resonance of these terms is difficult: Milder is not the only woman to whom 'Klang' or 'Metall' is attributed;[77] nor are they commonly ascribed to men in this period.[78] But Zelter's styling of Milder as a blacksmith suggests the masculinity of metal as material through the strength and stature of those who wield it. In combination with Milder's figure and cross-dressing roles, this projection of vocal size and power, whether explicit or via metallic metaphors, contributes to the accumulation of masculine tropes, and to the reinforcing circularity of their use.

Perhaps the invocations of metal and bell-clangs can most usefully be seen as part of an attempt by critics to create a distinctive metaphorical vocabulary for Milder's voice—an impulse that resulted in some slightly bizarre comparisons. The *MfGS* correspondent from Stuttgart in 1810, for example, stated that 'unforgettable to all is the sound which Mad. Milder sustained with the full force of her voice in harmonica vibrations', while earlier in the article, as stated above, hers was the 'harmonica-voice' that produces 'genuine German song'.[79] This analogy lived on in Stuttgart, with a letter from Georg Reinbeck in 1820 reporting a visit from Milder, who had delighted with her 'harmonica-voice': 'there we heard for once genuine German heartfelt song [literally, heart-song]'.[80] In 1812, on the other hand, Mosel cited a description, in the journal *Paris und Wien*, of Milder's voice as 'beautiful, rich in metal and similar to a clarinet';[81] and the *MfGS* the same year used the same adjective ('klarinettähnlich') to describe Milder's romance in Boieldieu's *Johanna von Paris*.[82]

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[74] *AmZ* No. 19 (9 March 1814), 164.
[75] *Dramaturgisches Wochenblatt* No. 3 (20 July 1816), 19.
[76] See also *AmZ* No. 29 (16 April 1806), 461; *AmZ* No. 41 (7 October 1812), 668.
[77] To Catalani is also attributed Klang and Wohlklang: *Hamburgisches Morgenblatt* No. 99 (17 August 1816), 799.
[78] In fact, in his *Vorlesungen über Deklamation und Mimik*, Seckendorff distinguished between 'hard, male metal' and 'strong, feminine metal': see his *Vorlesungen*, Vol. 1, pp. 292-293.
[79] *MfGS* No. 209 (31 August 1810), 835.
[80] Georg Reinbeck to Friedrich von Matthison, from Stuttgart, 18 August 1820, in *Friedrich von Matthisson's Literarischer Nachlaß: nebst einer Auswahl von Briefen seiner Freunde* Volume 4 (Berlin, August Mylius, 1832), p. 158.
[81] *Der Sammler* No. 148 (10 December 1812), 594.
[82] *MfGS* No. 4 (5 January 1813), 16.

In fact, the self-conscious pursuit of a vocabulary for Milder's voice is both recognised and more explicitly demonstrated by Rellstab in 1811.[83] The critic begins by expressing concern about the language solidifying around the singer, noting that the descriptions of Reichardt and other commentators made one think of her voice as 'a beautiful, full organ stop, but also just as flat, just as unfavourable, and just as monotonous as that [implies]'. He chose instead to compare her tone to violins of the school of the seventeenth-century Tyrolean maker Jakob Steiner, which, he makes clear, he prefers to those of the celebrated Cremona school. Rellstab's distinction between the (Germanic) Steiner and (Italian) Cremona violins reveals that the clarinet and harmonica comparisons and the metal references represent nothing so much as a desire to distance Milder's singing from the selection of trilling birds typically used to compliment (or insult) Italian virtuosity. They are, I would argue, another symptom of the early stages of creation of the rhetorical category of the German voice. Certainly this is suggested by a review of Milder in *Fidelio* in 1814:

> It is a great pleasure to hear Milder singing, for, though she possesses none of the methods customary here, and she constitutes, as it were, a new school, she attracts admiration by the rare clarinet-like tone of her voice.[84]

This necessarily brief archaeology of vocal metaphor opens up new ways of thinking about the much-noted instrumental nature of the vocal lines in *Fidelio* as a function of the original Leonore's particular vocal qualities.[85] But my argument here concerns rather the 'new school' that Milder projected through *Fidelio*, through the accumulation of roles, performances and critical discourse, and through her non-conformance (intentional or otherwise) to existing categories in operatic reception. This is the productive 'conflict and confusion' identified by Zelter in his letter to Goethe with which I began. Rather like the reviewer keen to assure readers that Milder's Klytemnestra never 'trangressed the sweet lines of femininity', Zelter attempted to reassert the singer's gender identity ('Imagine a calm, really feminine form') in the face of the disorientating androgyny and/or masculinity he identifies: by comparing her to the Pallas of Velletri, a huge, three-metre tall statue of Athena, goddess of war, wearing a helmet and breastplate (to which the head of the Gorgon Medusa is fixed); by comparing her to a blacksmith at the

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[83] *Thalia, ein Abendblatt dem Freuden der dramatischen Muse geweiht* No. 95 (27 November 1811), 379.

[84] *Der Sammler* No. 118 (24 July 1814), 471.

[85] This is often via brief references to fanfare figures, or sustained and repeated notes: see, for example, Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History of Opera: The Last Four Hundred Years* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), p. 170; Daniel Chua, *Beethoven and Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 159; Robinson, '*Fidelio*', pp. 93-99.

forge; and by commenting on her 'colossal' stature. Precisely the same impulse seems at play in the Stuttgart report that opposed the 'most genuine German song of a "harmonica voice"' to the decorated Italian school:

> She is about twenty-eight at the present time, tall and full in figure, and features, which close up are lovely, have in the distance, something austere, masculine, as well as her whole appearance on stage something determined. But in company she is simple and truly childlike, just like her enchanting song. She bears the stamp of the true genius, well aware of its power, but not showing it because it is natural to it, not acquired. He who learns to know her better will certainly be very fond of her, and is glad to see how the homage that she received on a daily basis has not affected the true femininity in her.[86]

Just as in Zelter's letter, her female – even, here, childlike — simplicity or naivety, as in Emmeline, is important in establishing the natural as a force to counteract the acquired, the artificial. And yet the masculinity of her stage persona and vocal qualities – the height, the strength, power, the heroicness —was equally important to the vindication of German opera: the monumental, masculinised soprano counteracts the effeminate castrato that gendered singing itself feminine. The rhetorical strain is evident in Zelter's negotiation of these contradictions (the broken syntax of 'buts' and 'and yets') and reveals more than ever the processes of category crossing that Milder enabled:[87] she was sufficiently hybrid, while not too disturbingly androgynous, to provide Garber's 'third'. Little matter than this 'new school' of German singing was dependent on older constructs of Gluckian reform opera.

Inconsistent, irreconcilable binaries continued to haunt those invested in German opera and the German voice, not least because of the larger oppositions of harmony vs melody/instruments vs voices, the dearth of German operatic hits, and the persistent supply and popularity of French and Italian opera. But I would argue that it was through singers and discourse about singers, and specifically through Milder's category crossing, that the new national category began to gain traction; it was through her masculinised soprano that German vocality could be imagined and articulated.

Madame Milder as Musical Germania

These male fantasies of the German as a heroic, masculine woman are not limited to the operatic sphere. While the representation of amazons and cross-dressers peaked in the early decades of Milder's career, the use of

[86] *MfGS* No. 209 (31 August 1810), 836.

[87] See too *AmZ*, No. 42 (13 October 1812), 691.

women as political symbols continued across the nineteenth century: Marianne, Germania, Joan of Arc etc.[88] In Heinrich von Kleist's ode 'Germania an ihre Kinder' (1809), for example, the nation is imagined not as the body of the monarch, but as an avenging mother, rallying her children with the power of nature (the ocean, thunder); Germania is often represented with Athena's costume of breastplate, helmet and skirt.[89] The increasing importance of the masculinised woman at the symbolic level occurred alongside the increasing binary divisions between genders, just as, as Marina Warner has argued, the feminine allegory of nation relies on the exclusion of women from public life:

> ... Often the recognition of a difference between the symbolic order, inhabited by ideal, allegorical figures, and the actual order, of judges, statesmen, soldiers, philosophers, inventors, depends on the unlikelihood of women practising the concepts they represent.[90]

This provides a different answer to the question of why the German voice should be a masculine female voice: the power of the symbol increases with its distance from the everyday.

But perhaps these resonances with broader narratives miss the specificity – and specific challenges – of German operatic discourse. While a focussed case study – just under fifteen years, one singer – has some obvious limitations in scope, there are clear long-term ramifications of the tropes developed for and by Milder's performances. In the first place, the discourse surrounding Milder has a direct impact on the idea of German operatic vocality and the *Fach* of the German dramatic soprano (Wagner's woman-in-waiting) as it developed across the nineteenth century. In so far as this has been attributed to particular singers, it is Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient that has caught scholarly attention, not least because of Wagner's most likely apocryphal account of his conversion experience during her performance as Fidelio.[91] To David Trippett, she was 'a mighty hinge for the German discourse on vocal melody' on account of the critical attention to her

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[88] See Ute Frevert on the after-life of the women soldiers on stage in 'German Conceptions of War, Masculinity and Femininity in the Long Nineteenth Century', in Colvin and Watanabe-O'Kelly, eds. *Women and Death 2*, pp. 169-185.

[89] See Bettina Brandt, 'Germania in Armor: The Female Representation of an Endangered German Nation' in Colvin and Watanabe-O'Kelly, eds. *Women and Death 2*, pp. 86-126, at 93-5.

[90] Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), xix-xx.

[91] Susan Rutherford evaluates the evidence for and against Wagner's encounter, and Schröder-Devrient's role as muse, in 'Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient: Wagner's Theatrical Muse', in *Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies*, ed. Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 60-80.

emphasis on declamation;[92] to the deficiencies of her voice and technique, particularly with coloratura; to the soul and naturalness in her performance that make up for them; to her acting ability. For Stephen Meyer, her role as a national symbol extended directly to political life, her category crossing in the decades leading up to 1848 embodying an '"aesthetics of liberation" within the German public mind'.[93]

Milder provides an early focal point for this discourse: her voice, her physique, her person afforded the rhetorical somersaults required of critics to construct German vocality, its combination of the natural and the heroic, its accommodation of male and female characteristics. Her role in this history has been little acknowledged: when Mayer locates Schröder-Devrient's reception in a tradition of German-Italian oppositions, he notably traces them to commentary on compositions or composers: to E. T. A. Hoffmann in 'The Poet and the Composer', or C. M. von Weber's review of Hoffman's opera *Undine*.[94] Thus the re-insertion of Milder into the history of German national opera and of the twin styles continues a process of increasing attendance to performers and performances alongside works and composers. At the same time, Milder's reception can inform our understanding of *Fidelio*, which has always occupied an uneasy position in histories of German opera: the one operatic output of the totemic composer, which was neither recognised as 'national' at the time, nor conformant to later concepts of German opera. With its French plot, mixed registers and national styles, it has been characterised as a 'craggy monument to the confused state of German opera at a moment of transition'.[95] Perhaps, however, *Fidelio* can also be seen as a more straightforward monument to emerging German operatic vocality; and the role of Fidelio, described by Michael Steinberg as 'a manly woman … the most austere of bourgeois, Protestant goddesses … Athena,'[96] as a monument to Milder herself. Perhaps then, we can begin to hear the historical resonances of Fidelio's cross-dressing: as a vehicle for Milder's performance as masculinised soprano, and, above all, for the production of critical tropes of the German operatic voice.

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[92] David Trippett, *Wagner's Melodies: Aesthetics and Materialism in German Music Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 205.

[93] Stephen Meyer, 'Das wilde Herz: Interpreting Wilhelmine Schröder–Devrient', *The Opera Quarterly*, 14/2 (1997), pp. 23-40, at 36.

[94] Meyer, 'Das wilde Herz', p. 27.

[95] Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera*, 170.

[96] Michael Steinberg, *Listening to Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 83